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SYDENHAM AND HAHNEMANN.*

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THERE seems to be an idea abroad among the people of the United States that homœopathy has done a great deal to lessen the amount of drugs used by physicians in their care of the sick.

As bearing somewhat upon the question, let us see what is the testimony of the past in regard to two men who, in this connection, may be considered typical—Sydenham and Hahnemann.

By virtue of seniority, Sydenham may first claim our attention.

Thomas Sydenham was born in 1624; in 1663 he became a licentiate of the College of Physicians of London; he lived sixty-five years. There is no need to recount here what he has done for medicine; yet a comparison of his character with that of Hahnemann may be of interest.

John Brown calls Sydenham "the prince of practical physicians."† "Morton, Willis, Boerhaave, Gaubius, and Bordeu speak of him as second in sagacity to 'the divine

* Read before the U. S. Naval Medical Society.

† "Spare Hours," by John Brown, M. D.

Hippocrates' alone." Hippocrates says that the four qualities indispensable in every good physician are learning, sagacity, humanity, probity. Sydenham had these. Like Hippocrates, he had a power of keen, serious, patient, continuous, honest observation, so needful in order that facts may become science, and a native quickness of perception, so requisite in the intelligent practice of medicine. Sydenham found that nature alone often cured disease; sometimes a few simple remedies appeared to help.*

And now what do we find written concerning the founder of homœopathy?

Samuel Christian Friedrich Hahnemann was born in 1775;† he died in 1843. His works are well known. The following views of his character as a physician are given by professed homœopathists:

Hahnemann was a careful observer, but a theorizer rather than a correct and profound reasoner. He had his own system of pathology and of therapeutics. He taught that nature was a bad physician, but that drugs were the real curative agents provided by the beneficence of the Almighty. By the same style of logic may we not attribute disease to the ill-will of the Almighty?

Dr. Wyld, vice-president of the British Homœopathic Society, says that "the views expressed by Hahnemann are often extravagant and incorrect; that Hippocrates was right when he said some diseases are best treated by similars and some by contraries, and therefore it is unwise and incorrect to assume the title of homœopathist."‡

This system has no scientific recognition in the land of

* Abercrombie, the Scottish Sydenham, deserves mention here as prominent among those who have done much to bring about a rational practice of the curative art.

† Sydenham's works were published in 1785.

‡ London "Lancet," June 2, 1877.

its origin. When a recent writer* says that this system "has revolutionized orthodox medicine," he seems not to know that the teachings of Hippocrates, of Sydenham, and of Locke† could reach the minds of men by any other way than through the school of Hahnemann.

He continues "that many of our own men abjure the minute doses which served so well in the hands of Hahnemann and many of his earlier disciples"—a suggestive statement!

Persons have been heard to say that homœopathy has diminished doses, and caused the use of milder means in practice. Would not the truth be rather that the teachings of Sydenham, and of such as he, are having their perfect work—first with the doctors, and then in the minds of the people? Is it not reasonable to think that from the precepts of such men have come the present intelligent study of the natural history of disease and the rational practice based thereon?

There may be a similarity between the result of the work of Sydenham and his co-laborers and the result of the work of Hahnemann and his followers; but can we presume a logical sequence? Can any one say with reason that the liberty of the citizen in the American Union is a consequence of the extravagances of the French Revolution of 1789? Because a man and a child speak words that seem to be the same, does it follow that the child has taught those words to the man?

Even as other brave, good men have aided the renaissance of other arts of modern times, so Thomas Sydenham has caused, in great measure, the resurrection of the medical teaching that Hippocrates gave to the world.

* "Homœopathic Review," January, 1880.

† "On the Conduct of the Understanding," by John Locke.

This great English apostle has not been without disciples. Both to him and to them is due our present form of rational medicine, imperfect though it be. They have shown the way, laid out the chart; but we of to-day have our own share of the work to do. It is in medicine as in sailing a ship; charts and rules may serve for general guidance, but when squalls or gales come—when shoals or breakers are seen—the pilot must have recourse to his own craft and courage.

The proper care of the sick must be by intelligence, not by routine. Let us first *apprehend*, then we may *comprehend*; but not as a matter of course.

Cullen said "that there are more false facts than theories in medicine." Does not this hint at imperfect observation?

Radcliffe used to say that when young, he had fifty remedies for every disease; and when old, one remedy for fifty diseases.

Because many pills do the patient no apparent harm, it does not follow that they do him good.

It may be presumed that the teachings of Hahnemann did not influence Jean Jacques Rousseau, who wrote before the French Revolution of 1789. He was not a physician, but an observer, a thinker, a veritable philosopher. There is food for thought in the following translations from his work entitled "*Émile, ou de l'éducation*":

"The wise physician does not heedlessly give prescriptions at first sight, but studies, rather, the temperament of the patient before ordering any dose. He begins late to treat the case, but cures the sick one, while the physicians who are too hurried kill their patients."

"Live according to nature. Be patient, and flee the doctors. You will not avoid death, but you will feel it once only; whereas doctors will keep it every day before your

unhappy mind ; and their delusive art, instead of lengthening your days, will kill all enjoyment of them. I shall always ask, indeed, what real good medicine has done to men. It is true that some of those whom it cures would have died, but thousands that it kills would have lived."

"An ignorant or a bad man may bring happiness to one by making a hundred miserable. Fools (well-meaning persons) rush in where angels fear to tread. The wise physician knows when to withhold his hand. Let Nature act a long time before you interfere, lest you spoil her work. You answer that you do not wish to lose time. Do you not see that bad action is worse than none? Do good, but sin not ; that is, refrain from doing harm."

These views are the apparent consequence of the practice of unwise physicians, or of bad men, whose actions thus have wide influence, reaching far beyond any particular case.

Rousseau continues: "In regard to the practice of medicine, men make the same sophisms as in regard to the search for truth. They always suppose that in treating the sick one cures them ; and that in looking for the truth one finds it."

"The science that instructs and the art of medicine that cures are very good ; but the science that deceives and the art of medicine that kills are very bad."

Sound modes of cure should be based on how things are, and on the way nature acts. The good in everything should be sought and seen—if it exists !

The best friend and the strongest ally of the wise physician is the *vis medicatrix naturæ*, although it may need aid, restraint, and careful guiding.

These various views of medical science and art may end with a few lines from an old English poet :

“ Hold thy hand ! health’s dear maintainer ;
Life perchance may burn the stronger :
Having substance to maintain her,
She untouched may last the longer,
When the artist goes about
To redress her flame, I doubt
Oftentimes he snuffs it out.”—*Quarles*.



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